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ABSTRACT

An intensive study of boys' experiences in two Boy Scout groups shows that scout programs provide important educational functions that schools and homes do not. Detailed field notes were taken on 75 events of the 2 groups, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 boys and their parents to explore what parents and boys felt they were getting out of scouting, and diaries kept by the parents were analyzed. Results show that scout programs help young boys develop a sense of themselves as people who are broadly competent, who know how to take charge of a group and get things done, and who have obligations to the community and its institutions. Scouts can perform these functions because it is a nonformal, private, and voluntary organization. Precisely because scouts provide an educational setting without the critical importance of school, it can place boys in significant roles and tolerate significant errors. As a voluntary institution, it is far more suitable than schools for teaching the importance of voluntary obligations. (RM)

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GETTING PREPARED:
NONFORMAL EDUCATION IN BOY SCOUTS

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Educators studying an exotic tribal culture would be intrigued by an educational system such as Boy Scouts--open only to the males of the tribe, designed to prepare pubescent boys for adulthood through distinctive teachings, containing a secret society, and marking membership by elaborate dress and insignia. It is remarkable that such a widespread experience has gone unexamined.

Boy Scouts has been part of the childhood experience of almost 33 million American men.¹ In 1980, scouts enrolled slightly over 2 million boys (about 20% of the 11 to 13 year old age group). The Official Boy Scout Handbook has sold 29 million copies, a publishing record placing it in the ranks of the Gideon Bible and the World Almanac (Fussell, 1982). Scouting is part of American folklore, a subject of childhood books from the Berenstain Bears to Lassie, the butt of New Yorker cartoons and Tom Lehrer lyrics. The very term Boy Scout has passed into American slang.

Yet, educators have ignored this institution. As Fussell (1982:3) observes, "the right sort of people don't know much about" Boy Scouts:

The right sort consists, of course, of liberal intellectuals. They have often gazed uneasily at the Boy Scout monument. After all, a general, the scourge of the Boers, invented it; Kipling admired it; the Hitlerjugend (and the Soviet Pioneers) aped it. If its insistence that there is a God has not sufficed to alienate the enlightened, its khaki uniforms, lanyards, salutes, badges, and flag-worship have seemed to argue incipient militarism, if not outright fascism.

Those academics who have bothered to look at scouting at all take a scornful view. Mechling (1978, 1980, 1981) sees Boy Scouts as an occasion

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¹These figures come from Boy Scouts of America. On the basis of our experience, we suspect they overestimate the number of active scouts.

for male gender display and elaborates the hidden sexual meaning of camp-fires and games such as "posion pit." Hantover (1978) interprets scouts as an institution which arose not in response to the needs of boys but to the needs of adult men to validate their masculinity, threatened at the turn of the century by the change from an agricultural to an urban society.

The academic literature interprets scouts as a class-bound institution attempting to keep boys pure by isolating them from the adult world and occupying them with trivial activities (Kett, 1977; Gillis, 1981; Hollingshead, 1975). (The scout leaders with whom we have discussed this point-of-view found it incomprehensible; it bore no resemblance to their reality.)

This study, to our knowledge, is the first that has examined in detail boys' actual day-to-day experience in the scout program. What, if anything, do boys learn from scouts? What is it about scouts that attracts early adolescent boys and their families? Does scouts add anything of importance to the way our society prepares adolescents for adulthood?

This paper has two parts. First, we describe the way certain types of families use scouts as an educational tool, as a way to reinforce family values and to achieve particular goals they have for their sons. We point out that scouting should not be viewed as a two hour meeting and a monthly camp-out; what is critical is the mutually reinforcing relationship between the scout troop and the family as educational settings.

Second, we describe the education that occurs in the scout troop itself. We look at what boys learn from three key scouting experiences--camp-outs, troop meetings, and scout ceremonies. We argue that scouts performs important educational functions that schools and homes do not. Scouts develops young boys' sense of themselves as people who are broadly competent, who know how to take charge of a group and get things done, and who have obligations to the community and its institutions. Scouts can perform these functions because it is a nonformal, private, and voluntary organization. Precisely because scouts is an educational setting without the critical importance of school, it can place boys in significant roles and tolerate significant errors. As a voluntary institution, it is far more suitable than schools for teaching the importance of voluntary obligations.

METHODS

Our view of scouting is based on an intensive study of boys' experience in two scout troops. Executive directors of the local Boy Scout Council recommended both to us as examples of well-functioning troops. During 1980-81, we observed the troops for fourteen months (seven months each). We took detailed field notes on 75 events--troop meetings, camp-outs, canoe races, flag ceremonies, Saturdays spent at a warehouse recycling papers, holidays spent riding around town in the back of a pick-up truck to put up American flags. After each event, we did an analysis of what skills were taught, what value messages were sent, what educational relationships occurred, and what role experience youth had.

During the fieldwork, the first author (an educator) remained a detached observer. The second author (an anthropologist) became a participant observer, enrolling her eleven-year-old son in the first troop we studied and then moving him to the second. On camp-outs, male research associates did the fieldwork; a female would have been atypical and intrusive. (Women were not unusual at troop meetings and other scout events. In one troop, the scoutmaster's wife and several mothers and fathers typically watched meetings from the sidelines--talking about scouting, helping out, and cheering on the boys.)

Focal Boys

In addition, we selected twenty "focal" boys in order to explore what parents and boys felt they were getting out of scouting. We chose boys in troop leadership roles, who had long-term scouting experience, and boys new to the troops, who noticed the commonplace.

With each boy and his parents, we conducted semi-structured interviews on such topics as what boys had learned from scouting, what new people they had met, and what experiences scouts offered that boys did not get elsewhere. In addition, the parents of fifteen boys kept diaries of their son's scouting activities and the conversations they and their boys and his friends had about scouts. These diaries (and the monthly discussions with parents when we collected them) were an especially valuable supplement to the fieldwork.

Review by Informants

This paper was reviewed by scouting professionals, the scoutmasters of the two troops we studied, and parents interested in the research. While informants corrected factual errors, none disagreed with the central points. The executive director of the local Boy Scout Council wrote on the cover of his copy, "a very Honest look at Scouting, Good and Bad".

Representativeness

Small-scale descriptive studies of this type offer the advantage of rich detail and concrete observation. An unresolvable issue, however, is how representative the situation is.

On the basis of interviews with scouting professionals about other troops, the troops we studied seem to represent common types. Both generally followed the national scouting program, although one placed much less emphasis on badgework and patrol organization than the other. Our troops, however, by no means represent the range of variation. We deliberately selected well-functioning troops because we wanted to see what boys learned from such a nonformal educational activity as Boy Scouts when it was going well.

In addition, our troops were located in Alaska in a community of 48,000 people. Camping was not as unusual an experience as in cities; most of the boys' families camped. Survival skills--particularly at 50 degrees below zero--were more important. Yet, in this locale as in others, Boy Scouts no longer attracts large numbers of boys. Scouts has lost out in the competition for youth energies to organized sports;

basketball, baseball, soccer, and hockey teams have multiplied and become open to younger and younger children. In its decline in scout membership and growing emphasis on youth athletics, this community resembles others (La Belle, 1981).

In short, we cannot say exactly how typical our troops may be. Adults reminiscing to us about scouting usually see their own troop as different from the ones we studied; their troop emphasized badges even less or camp-outs even more or were somehow unique. Troops have their own ethos. But there are also common patterns.

THE TWO TROOPS

The two troops we studied were sponsored by churches (Methodist and Presbyterian) and met one evening a week in the church basement. Apart from providing a meeting place and an occasional site for service projects, the church had little to do with the troops.

One of the troops (which we call the "University troop") met near the main campus of the state university. Its scoutmaster, relaxed and jovial, was head of the university's research proposal office. He had become active in scouting after his son entered the troop. He remained a scout leader, although his son (an Eagle Scout) was now in his twenties. The boys liked his good humor, although many of his jokes showed up their deficiencies.

Most parents in the University troop were professionals with high incomes; about half worked at the university. During 1980-81, the troop had thirteen active members, and about half of these were 11 to 13 year old boys.

The other troop (which we call the "Downtown troop") met near the central business area. Its scoutmaster was a maintenance man for the state Department of Parks. He was demanding, tough, and aggressively masculine in both speech and demeanor. The boys respected him as an exceptionally skilled outdoorsman, who, as one boy said, "really thinks about the physical world." The boys explained to each other that his angry outbursts at their incompetence shouldn't be taken too seriously. He also no longer had a son in scouting, although his son (an Eagle Scout) came frequently to troop meetings and taught scout skills.

Boys in the Downtown troop came from a mix of working and middle class families. The troop had 22 active members; almost three-fourths were 11 to 13 years old.

The scoutmasters and the boys in these troops fit a typical scouting profile (Survey Research Center, 1960). The scoutmasters, like those nationally, were married, the fathers of two or three children, and had sons who were or had been Boy Scouts. The boys were white and predominantly middle-class, although a sizable minority came from working class homes.

Both troops followed the national scouting program. Both scoutmasters saw the goals of scouting as teaching outdoor skills, developing leadership and character, and generally preparing boys for adult life. Both troops had patrols (although these were more organizational devices than functioning groups), boy leaders ("senior patrol leaders") who run meetings, and parent groups (the "Troop Committee").

In addition to the weekly meeting, each troop also went on camp-outs, conducted flag ceremonies for civic groups, and participated in

such events as Clean-Up America Day, Junior Leadership Camp, and Troop and Merit Badge Summer Camp. In the Downtown troop, boys also spent many hours in fund-raising activities--collecting and bundling newspapers for recycling (an activity which won the Governor's Conservation Award) and selling contracts to businessmen to put up and take down the American flag on national holidays. The University troop did not do such fund-raising; parents preferred to donate money rather than get up at 5:00 a.m. on holidays and drive boys around to put up American flags.

For active scouts in these troops, scouting involved far more time than a two-hour weekly meeting and a two-week summer camp, the image of scouts in the academic literature (Hollingshead, 1975). A boy who participated in all available troop activities averaged 29 hours a month on scouts in the University troop and 45 hours a month (due to fund-raising) in the Downtown troop (Table 1).

THE FAMILY AND SCOUTING

When we made our first telephone call to ask a mother if we could interview her about her sons' experiences in scouting, we were taken aback by her response. She wanted to talk to us about how much pressure she should put on her three sons to become Eagle Scouts (a family tradition involving her husband, his three brothers, and a large set of male cousins). Her youngest son had not shown the drive necessary to complete the Eagle requirements and she was worried about how much to push him.

The incident alerted us to the significance of the family in shaping boys' experience in scouting. In an important essay on the family as

TABLE 1
TIME SPENT IN BOY SCOUT TROOP ACTIVITIES

TROOP EVENTS	UNIVERSITY TROOP ¹				DOWNTOWN TROOP ²			
	No.	No. of Days	Total Hours	(% of Total Hours)	No.	No. of Days	Total Hours	(% of Total Hours)
Troop Meeting	28	28	42	(40)	26	26	52	(23)
Troop Campout	3	7	49	(47)	2	6	50	(23)
Troop Leaders' Council	2	2	3	(3)	3	3	5	(2)
Flag Ceremony	5	5	5	(5)	1	1	1	(.4)
Money-Making Events					14	14	86	(39)
Other	<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>(15)</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>(13)</u>
TOTAL	39	43	105	(100)	52	56	222	(100)
Council-Wide Events ³	<u>6</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>99</u>		<u>6</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>99</u>	
TOTAL	45	55	204		58	68	321	
Average Time ⁴ Per Month			29				45	

¹October-April.

²Late April to mid-July, September-December.

³These events represent a minimum of those available to scouts, representing those which were regularly attended by most scout troops in the area such as the camporees, Clean Up America Day, Scouterama, Junior Leadership Camp, and a Klondike Derby.

⁴This figure represents the time boys could spend on troop activities; not all scouts participated in all events.

educator, Leichter (1979) points out that families not only educate their children through what goes on at home, but families also "mediate" outside influences. They help select the experiences their children have outside the family. They interpret, criticize, reinforce, and add to what goes on in these settings. To understand the influence of scouting, we realized, it was critical to understand how families mediate the scouting experience.

Family Emphasis on Scouting

When we asked why boys had joined scouting, both the parents and their sons described a casual process that gave little indication of how intensely many families support scouting. Most of the boys said they had been Cub Scouts and had just continued on. A few told us that their friends had recruited them, that older brothers were scouts, or that their fathers had been scouts. The boys were aware that their parents were "for it," "kind of encouraged it," and "thought they'd get a lot out of it." But they viewed scouts as a "fun" activity and ignored the "values part."

Parents reversed these priorities. As one father explained:

I left Scouts in the eleventh grade. I came back and entered as an adult. Then your perspective changes. I realized what scouting was and what it accomplishes between campfires and activities. It doesn't matter a bit if kids learn how to use an axe properly. They may not have to use it at all when they're an adult. It's the values that matter.

Among many of the scouting families, we found a high degree of religiosity and patriotism, intense emphasis on achievement and community responsibility, and strong feelings about good manners and other values now labeled as "traditional." Parents felt that most contemporary institutions--including public schools--no longer supported such values. Boy Scouts provided a place outside the home where family values received support:

Boy Scouts emphasizes what I want my kids to learn. I was raised by the same values. I've got to teach my values to my kids. The schools aren't doing any of it. Good manners learned at home are reinforced at Boy Scouts. They're certainly not reinforced at school.

We asked parents directly whether scouts emphasized the "same values as your family or whether there were some differences in what you as parents teach your son and what Boy Scouts teaches your son." Almost all parents (85 percent) stressed that "scouting has the same values as we have tried to give him." Many parents indeed answered the question before we could finish asking it. Their sons (95 percent) agreed. "A lot of the same things the scoutmaster tells us, my parents say exactly the same thing," one scout sighed. "It's like they heard the same speech from someone."

Families used scouts not only to reinforce family values but also to accomplish other educational agendas they had for their sons. Some families wanted the program to teach their boys how to get along better

with other boys. One mother wanted her son the "houseboy" to get some exercise.

Several mothers raising boys alone wanted the scoutmaster to be a male influence. In one case, the mother had multiple sclerosis, was raising her son alone, and "had the guilties" about not being able to take him anywhere. In another, the father worked out of town for four weeks at a time, and the mother thought it unhealthy for the boy to spend all his time with her and three sisters. In another, the mother was divorced, had two sons who were constant behavior problems in school, and used the scoutmaster as a surrogate father to talk to her boys and intercede for them with school authorities.

In most families (80 percent), the father had been a Boy Scout. He had enjoyed scouts, learned a lot from it, and wanted his son to have the experience. Scout stories were family lore:

My husband and I were fishing in the middle of the lake. The wind was blowing and we couldn't get back. Later we learned it was a tornado. My husband was in Boy Scouts and knows a lot about how to do things in the woods. He got us back and built a fire under the boat to get me warm. He really did protect me.

Parents urged their sons to keep on with scouts even when the boys wanted to quit--due to scorn from friends, the press of schoolwork, or preference for the wrestling team. "I've kept pressure on him to get Eagle," one father acknowledged. "No one remembers the guy who almost made it." Parents praised scouts to their sons and criticized its chief competitor, sports:

When they get out of hockey, what have they learned-- just to hit each other around. I haven't seen too many merits in the youth athletic program as compared to scouting. Most of the community leaders at one time were scouts. The scouting program has taught them responsibility in the community.

We observed several battles during the year between parents and boys over whether the boy should stay in scouting. Sometimes the boy talked the parents out of it. In other cases, the parents held firm.

Scouting Education in the Family

Boy Scout ideology stresses passage out of the family and into the world of adult men. Camping is the central scouting experience because it places boys on their own. "On a camp-out, they don't have parents around to tie their shoes," the Downtown scoutmaster said loudly and often, "They have to learn to take care of themselves."

A few scouting events (such as father-son canoe trips) were intended to strengthen fathers' bonds with their sons. Fathers and sons, however, related to each other on these trips as joint members of a male company. Fathers avoided singling out their sons.

According to both scoutmasters, parents were not supposed to teach merit badges. Boys were supposed to call up adults they didn't know-- merit badge counselors--to teach them badge skills. "It's important for boys to meet adult men in the community and work with people who really know their subjects," one scoutmaster argued. "None of this mother stuff!"

Given this ideology, we were surprised at how much scouting education actually took place in the family, not in the troop. Few boys telephoned merit badge counselors. Many parents taught badge skills. One mother, for example, spent six hours going over the merit badge pamphlet on first aid with her son--teaching him about frostbite, heatstroke, cramps, etc. Another of our focal boys reported that his grandparents had used his summer visit to teach him his water skiing, nature, and swimming badges. "They made me do every requirement, even those that were out of date," he complained. "My grandparents are sticklers for the right way to do things."

We do not want to over-emphasize the role of the family in teaching scout skills. Some parents spent a great deal of time helping their sons with badge work and others did not. What the scout program did was to provide families with a convenient curriculum--merit badge activities and specific competencies to be achieved--and with the incentive of rank advancement.

Parents also pointed out the value of the scout program. One mother told her son that she taught Boy Scout first aid techniques in her university courses. Fathers told their boys the scout advancement program was important because it taught "the vital skill of learning how to set a goal and achieve it and how to organize your efforts and channel your energies."

Families reinforced scouting ideology. When parents helped their boys memorize the scout oath and law, they used the occasion to talk to them about the meaning of such abstract concepts as trustworthiness and loyalty and how these ideals were expressed in day to day conduct.

Parents also strengthened their sons' social identities as scouts. One boy, for example, complained that any time he forgot his hat, someone at home reminded him to "be prepared." When another boy lied to his father about his whereabouts before the scout meeting, his father asked, "How can you sit there in your scout uniform and lie to me?" He tried to get his son to repeat the scout law and told him that he was allowed to go to scouts because his parents believed in these values.

Parents helped boys deal with the new problems and unfamiliar situations they encountered in scouts. In the University troop, for example, the boy leadership structure collapsed during the middle of the year; boys arrived at meeting after meeting where no activities had been planned. Our parent diaries during the period record discussions between parents and their sons on such subjects as how you change leadership while allowing the person in the role to save face, how you handle a situation where a subordinate is undermining you, and whether you should accept office when your elevation will intensify factionalism.

Scouting, as we will later detail, placed boys in new roles, and parents helped them sort out their obligations. One mother described a discussion with her son about his responsibility to a member of his troop whom he didn't like:

Ever since my son Paul has been coming to the troop, Jake has muttered about him. Yesterday he was really on the subject. He is verbal but not verbal enough to really make a whole lot of sense on this abstract issue which is--how to deal with a very nice but boring and rather stupid person who follows you around and that you don't really enjoy but feel sorry for. Well, I phrased it something like that and told him I'd known people like that and had never known what to do--scouting has provided a context for this sort of discussion.

Parents shaped their sons' view of scouts, but scouts also shaped parents' view of their sons. Scouts provided occasions for boys to "show their fathers" that they were a good deal more competent than their fathers believed. One father pointed out that the boy he thought could do nothing but sit in front of a TV set was tough and resourceful when a canoe turned over and he and his son had to rescue other scouts. Another bragged how his son (the smallest boy on a 65-mile survival hike) came through "like a champ--the other boys called him the 'little engine that could.'"

In short, what scouts accomplished was to reinforce the role of parents as educators of their early adolescent sons. The program provided families with a curriculum--merit badge activities and requirements. But, more than this, scouts created "occasions"--situations where parents were drawn into discussions of moral conduct and social obligations, and where parents talked to their boys about how to deal with difficult people and complicated situations.

SCOUTING EDUCATION IN THE TROOP SETTING

Unlike schools, scouts places boys in a variety of settings--camp-outs, formal meetings, flag ceremonies, awards ceremonies, sales talks with businessmen, meetings with boys to plan a Haunted House or an obstacle course, afternoons in the scoutmaster's garage building a sled, or in the scoutmaster's truck taking down flags on national holidays. Each setting taught certain skills, sent certain value messages, and placed boys in different roles and social relationships.

We point out the varied activities, roles, and relationships which occur in well-functioning scout troops. We cannot, however, detail all these educational situations. Rather we describe three major educational events that repeatedly occurred in both of the troops we studied. We draw upon our interviews and diaries, as well as observations, to speculate on what these events taught.

The Camp-Out: Learning to be Tough

Camping is the core experience of scouting. The camping context is viewed as ideal for teaching physical fitness (you backpack; you do not camp out of the back of a pick-up truck), self-reliance (your mother is not there to take care of you), teamwork (you cook in patrols), and being prepared (you are miserable if you don't plan). The scoutmasters of both troops said camping was by far their most successful troop activity. "Camping is the big thing," one boy said. "I don't go in much for paperwork merit badges. I've been in the outdoors but in scouts you really learn how to enjoy it."

According to the Scoutmaster's Handbook, a minimum of ten days and nights of camping is expected each year. The troops we observed did more--one camp-out or other outdoor activity each month. The scoutmasters indeed prided themselves on the number of days and nights their troops camped.

Camp-outs varied in focus. There were endurance hikes, survival experiences, practice in building outdoor shelters from branches and snow, and merit badge camps ("factories" for rank advancement). On some camp-outs, scouts practiced emergency skills. Patrols, for example, had

fifteen minutes to use a compass to find an imaginary city and figure out how to get a victim out of a house where gas had exploded and treat him for shock. Other camp-outs resembled Outward Bound programs, tests of endurance.

The following description of a Fall Camporee (an annual event involving all troops in the Council) illustrates a typical camping experience and the messages it conveyed:

The church parking lot late Friday afternoon was filled with excited boys and hovering mothers, anxious about below freezing temperatures. After a worried conversation with the scoutmaster, one mother left with her boy to get warmer gloves. She missed the departure and chased the truck down the highway.

Arriving at the campsite, the boys (and two fathers) got their packs together and hiked to the camping area where they met other troops. The scoutmaster directed the boys to find a flat area for their tents, clear the area of snow (about one foot deep), and pitch their tents. New boys observed the experienced campers who showed them how to place tent stakes, erect fly sheets, cover packs with plastic sacks to protect them from the falling snow, and enter a tent without getting snow inside (clean off your boots and pants cuffs while kneeling just inside the tent).

An incident Friday evening set a theme for the remainder of the weekend. One boy didn't bring a plastic bag to cover his pack. When the scoutmaster asked him where it was the boy said, "My mother forgot to put it in." The other boys hooted. All weekend, whenever a boy asked where something was, a scout would say in a high pitched voice, "My mother forgot to pack it."

As boys made camp, the scoutmaster yelled, cajoled, and ridiculed them like a tough veteran sergeant with a bunch of green recruits. Two boys, for example, set up a line to hang their packs which ran across the path that had been made in the snow to get firewood. "What are you guys doing?" shouted the scoutmaster. "Making a pack rack" answered the boys. "Well look at where you're making it" the scoutmaster yelled. "Right across the path. Now ain't that dumb. Put it off to the side between them there trees."

Older scouts often used the same ridiculing style in instructing less experienced boys. (These lessons, we suspect, were remembered). New boys paid close attention and deferred to those scouts who were already skilled outdoorsmen.

Saturday morning the boys began to stir at about 7:00 a.m. The scoutmaster hollered from his tent that he wanted a fire built and coffee made for him. When the adults got up an hour later, each patrol was attempting to start a fire (only wet wood was around). The scoutmaster took charge of fire building for the patrol nearest the adult tent. Boys watched intently as he stripped off the wet outer bark, selected the most seasoned twigs, and blew on them until they caught fire. The other patrols managed their fires and the boys had Tang, Poptarts, and instant oatmeal.

After a morning assembly at the end of the lake, the scouts rotated through eight merit badge learning stations. At five of these stations, older boys taught pioneering skills--how to coil and splice rope, make knots and hitches, and build a raft. The older boys demonstrated the technique, and younger scouts practiced. At two wildlife stations,

adults taught wildlife habits and game management techniques and values. The boys learned to use bow saws to cut down small charred trees, which they then cut into logs to be used at the council fire later that evening. At the last station a scoutmaster taught rescue breathing techniques while the boys practiced on a dummy.

Most of the boys made serious efforts to learn, although a few fooled around. After two hours, the boys were too cold, wet, and hungry to learn anything. The patrols built up their fires and cooked lunch (soup, beans, and hot dogs). Afterwards the boys went fishing and returned in the afternoon to the badge stations.

During dinner, the boys talked about the day's activities and about pranks and hardships during other camp-outs. They tried to top each other with tales of cold, hunger, and endurance. "I carried a pack of 40 pounds for eight miles." "Well, I carried a 30 pound pack up a mountain."

The boys monitored each other for signs of weakness and slacking. "Come on Ralph, go get some firewood," one scout yelled. "You just want to stay around the fire and keep warm. You're not the only one that's cold." The boys pointedly discussed the toughness of accompanying adults--who slept in his truck instead of a tent, who brought a pillow instead of making one by rolling up his clothes.

The temperature dropped to 15 degrees that evening. At the scout campfire, everyone was too cold to take much interest in a cobbler contest. The troops made feeble attempts to present skits and songs.

Sunday morning the patrols again tried to start a fire. Many scouts stood around in socks or tennis shoes because their boots had

frozen during the night. Due to the cold, the mountain climb was cancelled. The scoutmaster was irritated, "I wanted to show these mini-wimps just how tough I am." He called the boys together and demonstrated how to take down and fold a tent. He then announced that he was going to inspect the campsites. "You should leave it looking like we were never here." The boys picked up bits of trash.

During the ride home, the boys talked about what a good time they had, their disappointment at the cancelled climb, and the various hardships. ("Gee, my socks really got wet"--"My feet were really cold").

What did the boys learn from the Fall Camporee? The experience taught obvious outdoor competencies--how to erect, take down, and pack a tent, how to shoulder a pack, how to build and care for a fire in wet snow, how to dry wet gear and keep boots from freezing. When we asked boys and their parents what the boys had learned from scouts, most emphasized "outdoor skills."

But these skills were not just competencies; they had important symbolic value. Boys talked about knowing how to handle themselves in situations that they worried about--being left alone after an airplane crash or after the death of their father. "I've learned enough from scouting so I wouldn't go crazy if I lost my Dad for a while on a hunting trip," one boy put it.

In the boys' view, what they learned in scouts gave them the competence to take care of themselves and to help out others. The boys' talk about what they learned in scouting included heroic survival and rescue fantasies--rescuing an injured girl after an automobile crash, being dismissed early from school to save the community during a nuclear attack. As a typical boy bragged:

If I am flying a private plane and something went wrong, I could survive if I survived the crash. If I went out in the winter and the car broke down in the middle of nowhere, I would know what to do. In my old troop in New Mexico, I had to survive 36 hours in the desert with very little water. Now I could do this comfortably. If some dude fell in the water, I could save him.

Younger scouts admitted that they were frightened about going on a winter camp-out or trying to split wood with an axe. In scouts, they learned they could do things they never thought they could:

I used to be afraid a lot. Before I use to think that I can't do anything. At camping, I used to think I'm no good and I don't know why I joined. Then after about half a year, I beat out Charles at making a fire. The scoutmaster gave me one match and coached me a little. I made the fire with one match. I didn't believe it. After that I could almost all the time start a fire with one match.

Parents worried (with justification) about the dangers of such experiences as winter camping where temperatures could suddenly drop to forty degrees below zero. The downtown scoutmaster held firm; knowing how to handle such dangers was the point:

Mana doesn't want to let them go, especially in the winter. They are going to get cold. The time may come when there is not going to be any choice and they are better off if they know what to do.

But parents had confidence in scouts as an institution and permitted their sons to take risks which they wouldn't ordinarily permit.

Beyond learning outdoor skills, what Boy Scout camping was all about was learning to be tough. The Fall Camporee illustrates this--the

bragging and oneupsmanship of the scoutmaster and the boys about hardships overcome, the references to "wimps", the scorn for the father who brought a pillow to sleep on. For boys who would just as soon watch cartoons on Saturday morning, the Fall Camporee was a test of manhood. Can you go through this miserable experience without complaining and without needing your mommy?

Learning to be tough was what distinguished camping in Boy Scouts from the boys' other camping experiences. Camping itself was not a new experience to most of the boys. All the boys' families camped. Almost every boy we interviewed (90 percent), however, emphasized that family camping was different:

It's harder to survive on a Boy Scout camp-out. You carry your own stuff and they expect you to carry a lot. Your parents think you can carry about half of what you can really carry.

Even when scouts taught outdoor skills boys learned elsewhere the skills had a different meaning in the scout context. One of our focal boys, for example, said that he had learned skiing at home, at scouts, and in a community college course. At home, he skied for fun. In the course, he learned skiing techniques. In scouts, he learned whether he could make it on an eight mile ski trip with a pack on his back.

The Boy Scout camp-out can be interpreted as a classic rite of passage into manhood. It separates boys from their mothers, places them in an exclusively male transitional environment, teaches skills and lore specific to males, and tests fortitude and endurance (Fiske, 1979). Scouting's masculinity themes are obvious and have been extensively discussed in the academic literature (Hantover, 1978; Mechling, 1981).

What is interesting is that the boys and mothers we interviewed (but not the fathers) paid little attention to these masculinity themes. When we asked if scouting had any effect in teaching boys "how a man behaves," boys' responses were puzzled and mothers' defensive. Boys typically saw scouts as showing them how an "adult" behaves or showing them how different kinds of men behave.

Scout camping communicated the importance of being tough and competent in the outdoors. What is interesting is not that scouts sent such messages--so do Marlboro ads. What is interesting is that the scout context enabled boys to display toughness through altruistic behavior. When we asked our focal boys whether they had met any boys in scouts whom they especially admired, almost all mentioned experienced older scouts who were good in the outdoors and who helped out younger scouts. One boy, for example described an older boy who noticed a younger boy sagging on a camping trip. Without saying a word, the older boy lifted his pack off his back and hiked on carrying two packs. In scouts, toughness could be expressed in this way.

The Troop Meeting: Learning How to Take Charge

What most surprised us when we attended our first scout meeting was that the person running it was a fifteen year old boy. The senior patrol leader conducted the meeting, organized teaching groups where experienced scouts taught scout skills, kept order, and ran the games. The scoutmaster watched from the back of the room. Occasionally he yelled at the boys to settle down. The scoutmaster also took over two or three times during the meeting, to the senior patrol leader's barely concealed irritation.

While boys ran the meetings in both troops, University meetings were raucous affairs, characterized by a high noise level, a great deal of physical activity including pushing, shoving, wrestling, and a high level of joking:

The scoutmaster announced that the troop would be conducting a Flag Ceremony at the opening of the University of Alaska/Hawaii basketball game. He needed five volunteers in full uniform.

"Do we get a free pineapple?" one boy asked. Another began to pantomime flag carrying. First he swaggered with the flag. Then he switched into an imitation of a mentally retarded person trying to hold up a flag.

Another boy joined in. "These are windshield wipers," he yelled, pretending to sway a flag rhythmically from side to side. Two other boys made windshield wipers out of their flags. "Now speed up," one called. All three imitated windshield wipers speeding out of control.

In striking contrast, Downtown troop meetings had the appearance of a board meeting in a large corporation. Boys got quietly in patrols, gave serious attention to the subjects under discussion, and volunteered ideas and time. Experienced scouts taught badge skills in an organized fashion and emphasized their importance:

A 13 year old teacher sat on the floor with three younger scouts. He read off a requirement for the communication skill award.

Boy teacher: Make an emergency phone call. There is an emergency situation at home, what would you do?

Boys respond seriously: Dial 911.

Boy teacher: You must remember--WHO, WHERE, WHAT!

Boy teacher repeats: What are the three things you give on the phone?

Boys respond: Who, where, what.

Both the University and Downtown scoutmasters believed that learning to run troop meetings developed "leadership ability." They frequently told the boys that the major leaders in the community had once been Boy Scouts. Boys' personal experience confirmed the view that Scouts prepared them for prominence. After spending two days selling flag contracts to businessmen, for example, one boy remarked loudly to his friends at a troop meeting, "I met a lot of managers who were scouts like the manager of Woolworth's was an Eagle Scout and the manager of Zales was a scout and a couple of the doctors were scouts." An Eagle Scout made the same point. He recalled a jamboree trip where he and his friends ate lunch in the U.S. Senate dining room and learned that the Vice-President of the United States was a Life Scout:

We were in there eating and Hubert Humphrey--former vice-president--comes up. He asked us boys, "Are there any Life Scouts?" And there was one Life Scout. And he said that he was a Life Scout and to make sure you go ahead and get Eagle.

What Boy Scouts provided was an unusual occasion for young boys--twelve and thirteen years old--to practice formal leadership roles. Most active scouts held these positions; unlike school, a boy did not have to be an athlete or especially popular or attractive to have an office. In both troops, active scouts had about a 1 in 2 chance each year of holding some important role--patrol leader, scribe, trainer, assistant senior patrol leader. The University troop (unusually small), had six official positions for 13 active members. The Downtown troop had 22 active members (about the national average--20 members per troop), but elections were held twice a year.

Most of the boys were interviewed (70 percent) had never held an office outside scouts. The few who had said that scouts gave them real responsibility and school leadership roles did not. "In school," a senior patrol leader said, "I was class president but that didn't matter much." In scouts, he explained the troop depended on him. If he didn't plan good camp-outs or an interesting program, the troop would disintegrate. (His concern was realistic, the University troop did disintegrate in midwinter when the senior patrol leader lost interest.) In school, the boys said, they never had real responsibility, just minor jobs like arranging a dance or organizing a showcase display. If a job was really important, a teacher would do it.

Through scout leadership roles, boys learned basic organizational skills--how to conduct a business meeting, work out an agenda, plan a monthly program of activities, conduct an election, appoint assistants and follow through to make sure they did their jobs. One mother emphasized that her son (troop scribe) was learning organizational skills at thirteen that she was now trying to learn in her thirties:

When I was a child you just showed up (at youth group meetings) and had to be good and agreeable. Tom has responsibility. I hear him on the phone planning, getting organized, giving other kids pep talks, telling them what to wear and what to bring. That's something I'm having to learn now as an adult with the Association of University Women.

Boys who held troop leadership roles learned how to handle challenges to their authority. Boys charged them with bossiness and ineptitude and criticized how they did things. ("You're supposed to be teaching us." "How come you weren't on the camp-out.") And scoutmasters publicly dressed

them down when they didn't plan a program, wear their uniform, or come late.

Troop leaders also learned how to handle public failure and humiliation. We observed a meeting, for example, where two prestigious teenage scouts came to the Downtown troop to conduct elections for Order of the Arrow (the scout honorary camping organization). The three candidates --the senior patrol leader and two other boys--stood tensely in front of the troop while the two members of Order of the Arrow read a list of questions about their conduct. ("Who in this troop is a friend to all? Who in this troop is cheerful when there is a tiresome job?") The senior patrol leader, a twelve year old, went on with the business of the meeting while the ballots were counted. He continued on with the business of the meeting even when he thought he had lost the election. On another occasion, we observed a senior patrol leader, sixteen years old, handle with grace a special meeting called to discuss removing him from office for not planning a troop program. Toughness training was not confined to camp-outs.

The primary way boys learned how to behave in leadership roles was observing older boys in these positions. "You're a little scout and you see all those bigger scouts being patrol leader," one boy said. "You kind of look up to them, do it the way they did." The scout program had a formal junior leadership training program, and scoutmasters occasionally coached boys, for example, telling them they were trying to do too much of the job themselves. In the main, however, boys learned by watching other boys, criticizing their performance, and trying to out-do them when it was their turn.

While the boys we interviewed found it hard to answer many of our abstract questions, they could compare in detail the leadership styles of different boys in the troop. Indeed one articulate senior patrol leader took over an hour to explain to us his theory of leadership:

Generally with Senior Patrolling, you have to be friends with everyone. You have to be friends with people to get them to do things. If a kid refuses to do things, I take him aside and tell him you have to hold up your end or the whole system falls apart... Leadership is confidence. You have to be confident that you can do it. And you have to be positive about everything.

He described to us explicit strategies for dealing with typical problems-- what to do when the scoutmaster and assistant scoutmaster disagreed, how to deal with boys who started fights or wouldn't work on badges.

According to most parents we interviewed (88 percent), scouts stimulated their son's interest in leadership. It gave them an image of themselves as people with the know-how to lead a meeting, head a group, or stage a public event. And some boys told us they applied what they learned in scouts to leadership roles elsewhere:

Before I went into scouting I didn't know what to do. Now if I'm picked to lead at school, I know what to do. I run it like a patrol. I pick an assistant and then we all pitch in. When it's done, I congratulate each person, tell them they have done a good job.

The Eagle Ceremony: Learning Community Obligation

Becoming an Eagle Scout was the aspiration of virtually every boy we interviewed. Getting Eagle meant fulfilling your parents' ambitions, improving your chances to do well in the world, doing something tough, and getting respect. As one scout put it:

To me, Eagle is the ultimate. There's a lot of family pressure. I'd be the only one in either family to be Eagle...They'll hire you if you're an Eagle. One of my friends got an Eagle. He went into the Air Force and now is Squadron Commander. It's a symbol. If you walk up to Joe Doe and he knows you're an Eagle, it brings you respect.

By making Eagle a boy could prove to himself and the world that he was among the elect. He was one of the one percent of all scouts who made it to Eagle. The requirements were hard. A boy had to earn at least 21 badges, have 16 months of troop leadership experience, and have carried out an independent community service project. Yet any boy (regardless of athletic ability or brainpower) could make it to Eagle.

What distinguished the Eagle rank was planning and carrying out a major community service project. Advancing to earlier scout ranks required service--six hours spent washing the windows of a church, for example, or building a box to hold the troop's merit badge pamphlets.

The Eagle service project, however, was different. First, it had to benefit the whole community, not just scouting. Second, the boy could not do it all by himself. He had to get others (usually boys in the troop) to work as volunteers. The Eagle service project was a

demonstration of community leadership ability, much like a doctoral dissertation is a demonstration of scholarly ability.

In the troops we observed, Eagle projects were showpiece efforts. One boy prepared a detailed road map for a volunteer fire department. Another repaired twenty-four church windows. Scoutmasters took pride in the number of Eagles their troop produced each year and the quality of their projects. The University troop scoutmaster was fond of recalling a past Eagle project--landscaping a corner intersection--which had taken over 200 hours of volunteer effort. Both boys and scoutmasters scorned "paper Eagles"--boys who had rushed through their badges or whose service projects amounted to clean-up jobs.

Beyond completing the formal requirements, Eagle Scouts were expected to have internalized a sense of community obligation. These expectations were evident at the Eagle Board of Review, fundamentally on oral examination, where adults (primarily parents on the troop committee) evaluated prospective Eagle Scouts:

Mr. A.: Will becoming an Eagle change you?

Eagle Candidate: You progress to become an Eagle.

Mr. A: Is there an obligation on you when you are an Eagle?

Eagle Candidate: There's an obligation to the community. Scouting makes you aware of the community.

The decision point in the Eagle Board of Review--the moment of consensus--occurred when the boy showed interest in the welfare of scouts or other community institutions.

Like a wedding or a baptism, the Eagle Ceremony itself was a formal occasion with engraved invitations, full scout uniform, suits and dresses,

and visiting relatives. The elaborate ceremony was intended to motivate younger scouts to work toward Eagle, and our interviews with younger boys showed it had this effect. For all involved, the occasion celebrated and reaffirmed traditional American values--civic responsibility, patriotism, religious belief, honor, leadership, even motherhood. We describe one such occasion:

The meeting room at the public library was filled with scouts in uniform, their parents, scoutmasters and former scoutmasters with their wives and children, family friends, and relatives who had traveled to town expressly for the occasion. The Master of Ceremonies (an Eagle Scout from the troop now in his early twenties) introduced the proceedings with rhetorical flourishes, personal asides, and extravagant tributes to the scoutmasters and scouting.

The program began with a procession of boys bearing flags--the troop flag, a flag for each scout rank, the state flag, the American flag, and flags from each country where the new Eagle Scouts had attended Jamborees. The audience rose for the Pledge of Allegiance and the invocation, given by the bishop.

The Master of Ceremonies spoke with feeling about the difficulty of becoming an Eagle and how he himself would not have made it without the help of the three scoutmasters present. He introduced the two brothers becoming Eagle Scouts (a double ceremony) who marched to the stage, escorted by their scoutmasters and a guard of Eagle Scouts. Lights were dimmed as a boy recited the Scout Law, lighting a white candle for each pledge.

A family friend rose to give the "Eagle Charge." He talked about the boys as "great honorable people, great citizens, great scouts." He recognized the contributions of each scoutmaster who had brought these boys to Eagle. He spoke of his own experience in scouting and his brother's and the effects of scouting in instilling in them the ideal of honor. He gave the new Eagle Scouts the charge to "be a leader and a leader for good causes," closing with a discourse on the obligations of an Eagle to his country and community.

The scoutmaster presented the Eagle awards to the boys. After receiving their own awards, the new Eagles placed smaller Eagle pins on their mother's dress. The scoutmasters read letters of certification from the President of the United States and the heads of the local and national Boy Scout councils.

The Master of Ceremonies announced that a mother's poem was always read at Eagle ceremonies, and it always "got to him." Three mothers, each of whom had a son who was an Eagle Scout, marched side by side to the edge of the stage and recited in ragged unison a poem about the growth of a boy toward Eagle. The poem ended with the lines:

Yes, it's only a pin, just an Eagle Scout badge
But the heart that's beneath it beats true
And will throb to the last for the things which are
good
A lesson for me...and for you.

The ceremony concluded with a reception--coffee and punch, and a white cake thickly decorated with Boy Scout symbols and the American flag. The new Eagle Scouts presented a slide show with shots of themselves, other boys, and scoutmasters on past camp-outs, hikes, and Jamborees.

"These are the things of scouting," they said with emotion, "you don't forget." The young boys watched with fascination.

One new scout asked his mother on the way home to buy him a camera so he could take pictures of the things of scouting.

The Eagle Ceremony celebrated much more than the achievement of an individual boy. The basic theme of the event was social obligation--the obligations adult men had fulfilled to young boys and the obligations the boys would assume as adults to other boys and to the community.

Scouts surrounded young boys with people who felt a strong sense of community obligation. These were people who took pride not in their career success but in what they did for the community. (One scouting informant uncharitably suggested that prestige in scouting substituted for prestige in careers.) Parents talked to their sons about how much they admired the scoutmasters, who spent hundreds of hours on scouting even though they no longer had sons in the troop. Parents pointed out that the scoutmaster was using half his annual vacation to take the boys on a canoe trip, that the scoutmaster was getting up at 5:00 a.m. every holiday to put up flags. The University troop scoutmaster announced at virtually every troop meeting that he was donating tents, a hunting knife, or other gear to the troop.

Scouting events increased boys' contacts with men active in community work. At the annual canoe race, for example, scouts observed men giving up their Saturday to organize the race, provide radio communications, monitor safety, and set up hot chocolate and doughnut stands. At such occasions, boys heard people praising those who had helped out. ("Tom took off work today to come out. He's that kind of person.")

Scouts constantly created occasions where the boys were expected to help other people out. At troop meetings, the standard routine was for experienced scouts to help others learn skill awards and merit badges. The senior patrol leader was conscious of heavy obligations for the welfare of other boys ("Got to make sure those wimps don't fall down a cliff".) Scouts put on bike safety rodeos for elementary school children, washed cars for the handicapped, and picked up trash on clean-up day.

Parents active in scouts cheered the boys on, bragged about what they did, and complimented each other on their fine sons. At one troop meeting, for example, a boy strutted in wearing full scout uniform. His mother announced that he was proud of himself because he had sold six flag contracts that afternoon. A father commented, "I admire that. I'm not a good salesman." His mother added that he planned to sell ten more contracts after school tomorrow.

Neither the scouts nor the leaders we observed were paragons of virtue. One father told us he had let his boy drop out because he had seen such things as older scouts throwing iceballs at younger boys on an ice fishing trip. A mother was amazed to learn that her boy had been left behind by older boys on a ski expedition. A scoutmaster joked about going out at midnight to cut down trees (illegally) for a camping trip. But scouting created a context where people censored such behavior.

Scouts functioned as a reference group. Boys were aware of the behavior expected of them. A patrol leader, for example, announced clear expectations concerning a Boy Scout party at the roller rink:

We want to act as Boy Scouts. You should skate more than you play pinball. Even if we're not here in the church basement, we are still scouts so don't trip people.

In short, Boy Scouts created a context where social obligations were highlighted. Scouts surrounded young boys with adults and prestigious older boys who modeled social responsibility. Scouts provided incentives--rank advancement and social approval--for boys to engage in service activities. Scouts created occasion after occasion where community-oriented conduct was demanded, expected, rewarded, and celebrated.

CONCLUSION

Nonformal educational agencies, such as Boy Scouts or 4-H or basketball and Little League teams, all claim to offer young people important developmental experiences. They all puport to develop character, good citizenship, leadership, physical fitness, the ability to work in a group, and so forth. How can we evaluate these competing claims? Are they all just rhetoric or do any of these activities accomplish such goals?

In an important analysis of high school students' experiences in a community-based learning program, Moore (1981) proposes a general framework for examining what young people learn in nonschool settings. Moore suggests that the key element is what "tasks" the nonformal situation offers. Education occurs when a person learns how to perform new tasks by making use of the particular information, materials, and people available in the nonformal setting. These tasks can include building a

cabinet, writing a newspaper article, or raising money for a community organization. What tasks are set and how these tasks get done depends on the structure of the setting (for example, the roles young people and adults hold), the organizational ethos (beliefs and value systems), and the kinds of people who occupy the setting (La Belle and White, 1982 following Moore, 1981).

What kinds of "tasks" then does the Boy Scout setting demand of early adolescents? Compared to community-based school programs (Moore 1981), the tasks in Boy Scouts are unusually concrete, ordered in difficulty, and equal for all participants. The most obvious set of tasks is mastering practical competencies defined by badge and rank advancement requirements--first aid skills, emergency skills, outdoor skills. Adults who were Boy Scouts in their youth have told us that they have used these skills on many occasions. It is helpful to know how to start a fire with wet wood or tie a knot that will hold.

Learning how to do these tasks had symbolic importance for early adolescents as well. Knowing how to survive in the woods or how to treat a victim of shock made young boys feel confident as they began to enter adulthood. They were not so helpless and vulnerable as they had secretly assumed. The experience also nurtured socially useful power fantasies. The active scouts we interviewed dreamed of accidents and disasters where they would emerge as heroes. They would be the men with the competence to be of use.

The second set of tasks Boy Scouts demanded of its members was learning how to take charge of a group, keep it together, and get a job done. Boys had to run a meeting, organize the other boys in their patrols to bring the

right gear for a camp-out, get a Haunted House set up for the Cub Scouts, or get together an obstacle course for the annual scout show. The scout program put boys in formal leadership roles with adults acting as coaches. In the troops we observed, scoutmasters took "boy leadership" seriously. In some cases, they let boys flounder until the boredom and bullying that resulted nearly destroyed the troop.

Boy Scouts is one of those rare settings where what a twelve or thirteen year old boy does really matters, where young boys routinely make successes or failures of significant activities. Scouts could allow boys this latitude precisely because the scout setting was of marginal importance. As the boys we interviewed were well aware, they could not hold important roles in school because too much depended on school. Schooling was too critical an institution; the repercussions of failure were too serious. If something was important, the boys agreed, a teacher would do it.

The third set of tasks Boy Scouts set for its members was to perform service activities. The initial tasks were minor--helping a new scout memorize the scout law, picking up trash on clean-up day. But the culminating task--the Eagle service project--was a major undertaking. It required a boy to identify something he could do to benefit the community. It required him to locate money and materials. Most important, he had to persuade other people to volunteer.

In teaching boys to assume voluntary obligations, the scout setting offers substantial advantages over the school. Unlike adults in schools, adults in scouts are volunteers. For the boys as well, participation in scouts is voluntary. Scouts can celebrate a community service ethic and model this behavior in ways that schools cannot.

Boy Scouts, in short, sets significant tasks in a supportive social and ideological structure. But most boys do not become Boy Scouts, and those who do tend to drop out of scouts as they leave early adolescence. In part boys simply outgrow scouting. Camping and running a troop offer no more challenges. They are ready for other things.

In part, however, scout membership declines at adolescence because boys become aware then that scouts carries no prestige. They learn that the very name "Boy Scout" is an insult. Other boys begin to mock the activity. ("Camporee, Jamboree, all those eeeee's," a friend of one of our focal boys brazenly sing-songed as we conducted a scouting interview.)

Becoming an Eagle Scout does bring a boy prestige. But the status a boy can gain from any sport far exceeds the status he can gain from Eagle. The local newspaper, for example, printed a twelve paragraph article on the virtues of the "Youth Athlete of the Week" on the sports page along with a photograph. When a boy became an Eagle Scout, the local newspaper printed a single paragraph on the youth page without a photograph, and disposed of his community service project in a sentence.

Membership in scouts, as in other traditional youth organizations, plummeted during the 1970's (La Belle, 1981). There are many explanation--the decline of patriotism following the Vietnam War, the rise of counter-cultural values, the rejection of traditional definitions of masculinity, the increase in two worker families where no one has time for volunteer work.

Membership in organized sports--Little League, basketball, hockey, youth soccer--surged, however, during this same period (La Belle, 1981). Organized sports has replaced scouts as a common activity for early

adolescent boys. In the 1950's, most organized sports did not begin until high school. The parents and scoutmasters we interviewed, for example, recalled that thirty years ago scouting was the main after-school activity available to young boys. Now eight year olds sign up for the basketball team and five year olds for soccer. Sports has preempted the developmental period appropriate to scouting.

Sports offers some of the same benefits as scouting--tests and trials to prove toughness, opportunities for cooperative effort, something to do with free time. But the tasks it presents are much narrower and the ethos fundamentally celebrates winning. For the many boys without athletic prowess, organized sports amounts to little more than benchwarming--long periods of idleness occasionally interspersed with conspicuous humiliation. In scouts, as boys pointed out to us, anyone who puts in the effort can win. Some of the boys who became Eagle Scouts were scholarship winners and stars on the basketball team; others were in the vocational track at school and failures in every sport.

What is also distinctive about scouts is the concept of winning that it celebrates. The ideal actually celebrated in the scouting program, ironically, is not the "Boy Scout," that apple-cheeked lad of virtue. The ideal is the Eagle Scout--broadly competent, with the confidence to take charge, aware of obligations to other people, and having the skills to discharge them. With the decline of such nonformal educational institutions as Boy Scouts, this is no longer an ideal our society is choosing to place before its children.

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